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By MM NARA Date 4/10/07

MEMORANDUM

THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN...
THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTONTOP SECRET/SENSITIVE/EXCLUSIVELY EYES ONLY

April 24, 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR:

THE PRESIDENT

FROM:

HENRY A. KISSINGER

SUBJECT:

My Trip to Moscow

I spent thirteen hours with Brezhnev and Gromyko and five more hours with Gromyko only. Dobrynin was present at all sessions and other Soviet officials attended the Brezhnev sessions. The central results and conclusions are as follows.

Vietnam

-- The Soviets endorse and are transmitting to Hanoi our procedural proposal on resuming the private and plenary talks on Vietnam. This has already resulted in their acceptance of the May 2 date for a private meeting.

-- The Soviets are also forwarding our substantive proposal to Hanoi, despite an undoubtedly negative reaction.

-- Katusev, the Central Committee member in charge of relations with other Communist parties, left for Hanoi at 5:25 a.m. 23 April while I was in Moscow.

-- Brezhnev countered with a proposal for a standstill ceasefire which I made clear was unacceptable with the presence of invading North Vietnamese divisions. It is nevertheless noteworthy that he put forward any proposal; and a ceasefire-in-place would not be very attractive to Hanoi either, when its forces have failed to capture a single major town and would have to see their major psychological and military efforts frozen short of major objectives.

-- The Soviets, on the other hand, gave no actual promise that they would lean on their friends, either for deescalation or a final settlement. They disavowed any responsibility for the North Vietnamese offensive.

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They hinted that they had not answered new requests but they also had the gall to maintain that they hadn't provided all that much offensive equipment in the first place.

-- I made very clear that we held Moscow to account for the escalation just prior to the summit and that we would prevent an allied defeat no matter what the risk to our other policies, including U.S.-Soviet relations and the summit. I emphasized that there had to be a private meeting by May 2 and that if there were not significant progress at that session, we would resolutely pursue our unilateral course.

-- Furthermore, you would have to turn to the right domestically and gain the support of precisely those elements who were not in favor of better U.S.-Soviet relations in any event. This would clearly inhibit your flexibility at a summit meeting, assuming there still was such a meeting.

-- This all took place against the background of our bombing of Haiphong (and damage to Soviet ships) and Hanoi, continued bombing up to the 20th parallel during this period, and the clear option of bombing wherever we like after May 2 if there is no movement at the conference table.

-- In short, we did not achieve a breakthrough on Vietnam. On the other hand, we got our message across; involved the Russians directly in transmitting our proposals to Hanoi; have certainly annoyed the North Vietnamese by just being in Moscow; will issue a joint announcement that, together with Le Duc Tho's return for a private session, will assuredly help us domestically by suggesting something is up; and have effectively positioned ourselves for whatever military actions we wish to pursue after first having once again demonstrated our reasonableness.

Other Issues

-- Brezhnev made effusively and redundantly clear the Soviet eagerness for, and his personal political stake in, a successful U.S.-Soviet summit meeting. On every issue, whether substantive or cosmetic, his emphasis was on the most comprehensive and concrete achievements possible.

-- He tabled a set of principles in American-Russian relations that closely followed the concepts we submitted through the private channel. His injunction was for us to strengthen it further if possible, and they accepted our modifications almost without exception. The result is a

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statement of how relations between the two superpowers should be conducted that is solid and substantive without suggesting political cooperation (like the Franco-Russian document), or implying any condominium or negating any of our alliances or obligations. It should serve as a significant finale to the summit and should discipline the Chinese without alienating them. Moreover we can say that it rejects the Brezhnev doctrine.

-- Brezhnev also gave us a SALT proposal that is considerably more favorable than we expected. Moscow agrees to include SLBMs at a time when it looked almost certain that we would have to drop this aspect in order to get an agreement by the summit. And the Soviet margin in submarines (21) is partly accounted for by their adding UK and French boats to our total and compensated for by their commitment to phase out their older land-based missiles, as well as the basing advantages we have. Their ABM proposal is a variant of our compromise solution and leaves us with more ICBMs protected than they. They bought our position that the offensive freeze last five years instead of three. They agreed to freeze soft ICBMs. In short, if the summit meeting takes place, you will be able to sign the most important arms control agreement ever concluded.

-- Whether we would have gotten this SALT agreement without my trip is certainly a debatable question. They might have moved in Helsinki anyway, but the signs before my trip went in the opposite direction. What is not debatable is the fact that this agreement was produced by your intervention and use of the private channel, and that the specific commitments were delivered by the Soviets only in conjunction with my visit. Thus you deserve personal credit for this breakthrough.

-- On European issues Brezhnev and his colleagues displayed obvious uneasiness over the outcome of the German treaties and made repeated pitches for our direct intervention. The results of Sunday's election and the FDP defection have heightened their concern, and the situation gives us leverage. I made no commitment to bail them out and indeed pointed out that we had been prepared to assist them through Bahr but had not done so because of the North Vietnamese offensive. We will see to it that we give them no help on this matter so long as they don't help on Vietnam.

-- Brezhnev at least agreed to consider our concept of separate explorations on MBFR in parallel with those on a European Security Conference. We have no assurance he will actually carry this out, however.

-- The Soviets are anxious on the Middle East (Sadat is due in Moscow momentarily) and Gromyko pushed hard on this the last two days.

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They tabled substantive proposals that represented nothing new and pressed for a timetable on negotiations that is considerably faster than what they outlined before. They went so far as to suggest that the summit atmosphere would be marred by lack of progress on this issue. I gave them no substantive satisfaction, confining myself to willingness to discuss this issue over the coming weeks, while making clear the difficulties involved.

-- On bilateral issues I sketched promising vistas, but always with the implied caveat of Vietnam's not getting in the way. Thus I indicated we would probably approve Export-Import Bank facilities during the summer and that you would consider asking Congress for MFN treatment, though implementation would be a year off and depend squarely on whether Soviet equipment was still killing our men in Vietnam. In such areas as science, the environment, and cultural exchange, they were in favor of the most concrete possible outcomes during and after the summit. Here too I indicated a reciprocal attitude, assuming that our overall relations developed favorably.

-- In short, these meetings confirmed that your Moscow summit -- if we go through with it and Vietnam is under control -- will dwarf all previous post-war summits in terms of concrete accomplishments and have a major international and domestic impact.

-- On these issues my instructions were to be forthcoming in order to get Russian help on Vietnam. Since I heard no assurance of their assistance, I primarily listened in these areas -- after first confining the talks to Vietnam. The upshot was a standoff (at least for now) on Vietnam while they made a series of moves on summit-related matters.

-- We have accordingly gotten a better summit if we want it while giving up no options on Vietnam and positioning ourselves better for whatever options we do choose to employ.

Brezhnev and the Soviet Dilemma

Brezhnev's performance suggests that he has much riding on the summit. He is tough, brutal, insecure, cunning and very pragmatic. His almost reverential references to you and his claims that he wants to do everything to help your re-election -- however disingenuous they may be -- suggest that he sees his relationship with you as legitimizing and strengthening his own position at home. We may have an election in November; he acts as if he has one next week and every week thereafter.

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He has undoubtedly had to sell his Western policy to doubters in the Politburo. I am sure he did so with a line of reasoning that has much that is inimical to our interests. But it has also given him a stake in a steady relationship with us. But now, with our forceful actions in Vietnam, all of this is in the balance (at the very time, incidentally, when his German policy is under a big question mark too). We will never know for sure whether Moscow colluded with Hanoi's offensive or whether Hanoi, having been given the capability by the Soviets, decided to move on its own. In either event our actions must have come as an enormous shock. Not only have we again put a "fraternal" ally under the gun, we have hit Soviet ships and threatened to do more to Haiphong. And the DRV offensive so far is moving neither fast nor decisively.

The Soviet leaders always have the knives out for each other and the lines of attack against Brezhnev under present conditions can be numerous and diverse. He is more vulnerable than any past Soviet leader, even Khrushchev in 1960, to the charge that comes most easily to the Soviets -- as Russians and Communists -- that he has staked too much on the foreign capitalists.

Meanwhile, Soviet options in the present situation are beset with dilemmas. If they stay passive vis-a-vis Hanoi while the offensive continues, they must now assume you will go all out against the North. To go forward with the summit in those circumstances is for them psychologically and politically an agonizing prospect. To cancel the Summit may, in their view, lead to your defeat in November, but not without our having meanwhile pulverized the DRV and Brezhnev's Western policy having collapsed. Much the same would happen if you cancelled the Summit or if you came but were hobbled by right-wing pressures. But the alternative to all this -- pressure on Hanoi to desist -- means the betrayal of a socialist ally, the loss of influence in Hanoi and no assurance that Hanoi will stop the offensive and we our retaliation.

In sum, I would have to conclude that Brezhnev personally, and the Soviets collectively, are in one of their toughest political corners in years. They must want the Vietnamese situation to subside and I would judge that there is just a chance that of all the distasteful courses open to them they will pick that of pressure on Hanoi -- not to help us but themselves. The dispatch of Brezhnev's confidant, Katusev, to Hanoi tends to bear this out.

The stick of your determination and the carrot of the productive summit with which I went to Moscow, which I used there and which we must now maintain, give us our best leverage in Kremlin politics as well as the best position in our own.

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